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AUTHOR Wilson, M. Lee
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ABSTRACT

Problems of using standardized tests with multicultural/multilingual Alaskan native students include cultural bias and examiner bias. The Wechsler Intelligence Scale for Children-Revised (WISC-R) was administered to 320 Alaskan native children in an attempt to establish local norms for the WISC-R. Results showed that bicultural/bilingual children in rural Alaska seemed to perform within the normal range for the norming sample on performance items requiring receptive knowledge of English. Verbal scores, however, showed a wide discrepancy with rural native Ss scoring significantly lower than the norming sample. The full scale IQ was also lower for the native Ss. (CL)

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Rural Alaska WISC-R Norms

M. Lee Wilson
University of Alaska, Anchorage

Abstract

This discussion of the problems of using standardized tests with multicultrist/multilingual children in public school settings in Alaska, focuses on the problems and on possible school solution to those problems. The impact of standardized testing on a child's placement in the public school system is phenomenal. Test users of the future must find ways to circumvent problems inherent in tests that are biased toward the anglo-core culture.

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Background

The predominance of the white conformity concept in the United States forms the basis for current testing practices. These practices are used particularly in public school systems, for the evaluation of children for placement in special education programs. The implied meaning and assumption behind standardized tests in the United States assumes that all children taking the tests have been raised in families that have been integrated into the middle class white culture. Present assessment techniques make little allowance for children who are members of families who have language, cultural and/or physical differences from the "average" cultural group. In making these assumptions about children's abilities, including "intelligence" the erroneous assumption is made that all children come from a basically similar background and thus will have had equal opportunity in terms of experience with situations which would prepare them for the test items.

This presupposition of conformity to the basic "core" culture on which most present tests are based has generally resulted from the relationship between the majority being tested and public school education. Public education, in each country, has basically been monoculture and monolingual in terms of expectation. The first true intelligence test published in 1905 was designed specifically to identify French children who need to be placed in schools for the mentally retarded. Binet (1905) selected test questions which covered a wide variety of tasks that the "average" French school child should have known or been able to perform. In 1917, Terman translated Binet's test into English, expanded the age limitations and did some modification so the questions would fit North American

culture. Terman wanted to be able to predict children's performance in the public school setting. Subsequent test makers have basically followed Binet's and Terman's models for test construction.

This belief that everyone living in the United States has conformed to the "average" in terms of language and culture, has influenced the content, procedures, and language used in most standardized intelligence tests to date. These tests require the mastery of written and/or spoken standard English. They have questions that become more progressively advanced in the need for both receptive and expressive verbal language skills. They also presuppose a solid background in knowledge of the history, values, customs, and mores of the anglo core culture.

With the advent of cases where parents have gone to court in order to reject the findings of and placement of children in special education programs based on these culturally biased tests, persons in the field have been struggling with ways to rid the test of their inherent biases. There seems to be two basic schools of thought on how this should be accomplished.

One way to try to eliminate bias is for the tester to be aware of the biases built into the test and to try to make individual adjustments for each child when administering and scoring the test. While this idea may seem a good simple solution, it in fact is not. One of the premises of standardized testing, biased or unbiased is that each child will have the same exact opportunities when taking the test and having the test scored. There are too many examiner variables which come into play and which then make the test results just as invalid as before.

A second method is to try to develop a test that uses the dominant language and culture of the children being tested. If what was being tested for was true, innate, ability, then this type of test would be appropriate. However, as is known, but often not admitted to, what is being tested for is the child's capacity to do academic work as presented in the cultural/language biased educational systems be they in Midtown, Ohio, Harlem, N.Y, or rural Alaska. (Turco, 1974).

With the above points in mind, it should seem appropriate to take a current widely used intelligence test that has good reliability and validity and re-norm the test for groups who have other different cultures and/or primary language than the core anglo culture. The use of Local norms would enable school districts to compare children to their peers. (Elliott, 1980.)

The Weschsler Intelligence Scale for Children - Revised (WISC-R) contains 12 basic subtests. Six subtests for obtaining a verbal IQ and six subtests for obtaining a performance IQ. (Only five in each area are actually used for IQ computation). A combined verbal and performance score give a full scale IQ. All of the subtests which go into establishing a verbal IQ require a good working knowledge, receptively and expressively of the English language. The performance subtests require the child to understand instructions given in English. It thus is assumed when administering and scoring the WISC-R that the children being tested have had an equal and similar opportunity to learn the materials presented in the test as those on whom the test was normed. This assumption when dealing with multicultured/multilingual children is erroneous.

Description of The Study

The purpose of the research was to establish local rural Alaska Native norms for the WISC-R. The re-norming was done on a cross-section of children who live in Yupik speaking rural Alaska villages. Ten children at each of the 4 month age groupings for ages 6-10 to 16-11 were given the WISC-R for a total subject population of 320 students. The children were picked randomly from each of the village schools. Sex was controlled so there were an equal number of males and females. None of the students had previously been identified for special education programs.

Treatment of Results

As the study sample population as limited, due to limited numbers of students in rural Alaska, only the mean and standard deviation for the three major scores on the WISC-R were obtained. These are the verbal IQ, Performance IQ, and Full Scale IQ.

The results tend to show that biculture/bilingual children in rural Alaska seem to perform within what is the normal range for norming sample on the performance items that require only receptive knowledge of English language.

The scores on the verbal subtests, however, show a wide discrepency with the rural native students scoring significantly lower than their anglo counter parts. The full scale IQ, for native children, because of the extreme discrepancy believe the verbal scores of native and anglo children is also significantly lower than their anglo counterparts.

TABLE I

RURAL NORMS					WISC-R NORMS			
Verbal IQ	$\bar{X}$	75.4	S.D.	12.1	$\bar{X}$	100	S.D.	15
Performance IQ	$\bar{X}$	95.2	S.D.	10.4	$\bar{X}$	100	S.D.	15
Full Scale IQ	X	84.1	S.D.	12.3	X	100	S.D.	15

With these results, children in rural Alaska could now be measured against their own local norms when being tested for any special placement. The norming of the WISC-R on this small sample of rural Alaska native students is only a small step in the beginning of a series of extensive re-norming that should take place. Both Federal and State Law requires that testing of children for special education placement be done in a non-biased manner. The re-norming of test can bring local school districts into compliance with these laws.

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